



Speaking for a cause

by: Danielle Rindler

Kent Johnson didn't expect to fall in love with Bloomington. But he did.

Johnson, the spokesperson for the 2010 Homeward Bound walk, first came to Bloomington in order to help his daughter through some hard times. He found a job and an apartment, but when tough economic times hit and business slowed down, Johnson, like so many others in Monroe County, was faced with the dilemma of homelessness.

"Have you ever heard the expression two pay checks away from homelessness? Yeah, I was one paycheck away," Johnson said in an interview on Dec. 11, 2009.

During the five months that he was homeless, Johnson benefited from several local agencies, including Martha's House and the Shalom Community center.

"Just about every agency that Homeward Bound is involved with has probably touched my life in some way," he said.

It was during his time at Martha's House that Johnson first heard about Homeward Bound. One of the women who worked there, "Mamma Pat" as Johnson affectionately refers to her, encouraged him to go one year. After attending once, he was sold.

"I went and it was just like a million people, hanging out having a good time doing good things for people in need," he said.

Johnson, who is originally from Chicago, was – and continues to be – struck by the hospitality and generosity he finds in the Bloomington community.

A long-time musician, Johnson is now finding a way to give back to those places that helped him most. Last fall he released his CD, titled "Playin' for Change," to benefit the Shalom Community Center.

There's a line in one of his songs where he says, "it's a hard life, life in the street, and there's a finer class of people here than you might think you'd meet," a sentiment that Johnson reiterates whenever the subject of Bloomington comes up.

Johnson recalls watching an anthropology special where they talked about a body they had dug up from thousands of years ago. The body belonged to a man who had been born in terrible health with arthritic bones, but who researchers estimated to have been about 45 when he died.

"Somebody took care of him," Johnson said. "It's human nature ... not something we just invented after the depression. This goes back in humanity thousands and thousands of years. We look after people if we can, and I think we can. And Bloomington is a perfect example of that."

Johnson said he is particularly proud to be part of such a community. "I feel like being asked to play for Homeward Bound is kind of like an invitation to join the community," he said. "To say hey, come and be part of what's going on. So I'm really looking forward to that."



Hoosier Hills Food Bank collects and distributes nutritious food to organizations, with free feeding programs



Martha's House provides an overnight shelter with the professional social services to help with self-sufficiency



Youth Services Bureau of Monroe County provides services to strengthen families and foster positive development

Community Kitchen of Monroe County, Inc.



Community Kitchen provides free nutritious meals, education, and referrals to other agency services



Mother Hubbard's Cupboard is a community food pantry that offers healthy groceries and nutrition education



Shalom Community Center provides access to food, housing, education, and health and human services



Area 10 Agency on Aging works to improve quality of life for senior citizens



Middle Way House seeks to end abuse of women and children through programs aimed at individual and social change



Stepping Stones provides a structured environment for young people to hone independent living skills

The Agencies that Stepped-UP:



Amethyst House provides structured living environments, treatment, for those struggling with substance abuse



Monroe County United Ministries offers subsidized childcare and help with living expenses



Centerstone provides behavioral healthcare and offers mental health, substance abuse and educational services

Real Life Stories

The twelve agencies that are supported by Homeward Bound have helped many people in desperate need in our community. Here are just a few ways that Monroe County United Ministries (MCUM) has helped.

A single woman was released from jail after nine months of incarceration. She had earned her GED while in jail and was soon able to find a job paying \$10 per hour. She had already improved her position considerably by continuing her education and committing to a job, but without rent assistance from MCUM to maintain her housing during her transition, she may not have continued to improve her life. Eviction could have threatened her job and returned her to a path that may have resulted in further jail time.

A single mom with two kids was living with her mother when she was injured at work, resulting in a loss of income while she recovered. The delay in receiving worker's compensation payments meant the family was soon behind on their bills, despite the grandmother's continued employment at \$7 per hour, working 30 hours per week. Rent assistance from MCUM allowed the family to stay in their home during this challenging time. The mother quickly returned to work and the household again had enough income to cover their expenses.

In both of these stories, the wage earner was supported in their efforts to return to employment and self-sufficiency through rent/mortgage assistance. In addition, the children were able to stay in school, adults were able to focus on returning to work rather than finding new housing, the household did not incur any of the expenses of relocation, the household did not lose any belongings as often occurs during an eviction and the family did not become homeless. This shows that no matter how big or small, any help at all is important.



Homeward Bound Scramble

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|------------------|--------------|
| 1. omelhse | 2. unoetrvel |
| 3. kwal | 4. eaondt |
| 5. yvrpeot | 6. osropr |
| 7. damoweh nudob | 8. gniesca |

Answers: 1. homeless 2. volunteer 3. walk 4. donate 5. poverty 6. sponsor 7. homeward bound 8. agencies

Homelessness Facts

- Monroe County's housing costs are among the highest in the state.
- 27% of Monroe County residents are experiencing poverty.
- 5.7% growth in the amount of residents in Monroe County living in Poverty from 2006-2007.
- 175 Kids in Monroe County School District are homeless. That's an increase of 151 kids last year.

Statistics from 2009 US Census Bureau American Community Survey; 2009 McKinney-Vento Act

How to Get Involved

- Go to Homewardboundindiana.org to learn more about the walk.
- Walk!
- Become a partnering sponsor
- Form a team and fundraise
- Volunteer the day of the walk
- Make a monetary donation
- Make an in-kind donation of you talents, goods, or services

The 8th Annual Walk will take place:

**Sunday, April 18th, 2010
11:30-4:00PM
Third Street Park**

Major Walk Sponsors:

